

Alternatives Considered in Detail
Description of Alternatives; Alternative D

all of the identified Areas of Geologic Interest that lie outside WSAs recommended suitable for designation. All proposed projects would be examined to ensure the formations are not adversely affected. To avoid possible adverse effects from increased public exposure, such as vandalism and removal of speleothems, access to caves would not be improved. The areas would remain open to ORV use. No surface occupancy associated with mineral lease development would be allowed within 250 feet of fragile geologic formations or caves.

A cave management plan would be prepared for these areas. This would include fire suppression guidelines to limit surface disturbance near the geologic formations.

T1-Transfer. 1,385 acres. These areas would be available for transfer from Federal ownership. Transfer could be by sale, exchange, agricultural entry, or other means determined appropriate as *discussed on pages 3-15, 3-16, and E-1 to E-3*. Detailed examination would be conducted for these tracts prior to the final decision about transfer or type of transfer. Examinations would consider threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, and other resource values. *Agricultural entry applications and other transfer proposals for these areas would be considered in the order received.*

In Alternative D, only parcels of very low multiple use value are included in T1. Most parcels included in T1 have non-Bureau disposal proposals, agricultural entry applications, or trespasses on them. Agricultural and occupancy trespasses are included in T1 where multiple use values are low, a definite physical barrier to further encroachment exists, and disposal of the tract would solve the trespass problem. A definite physical barrier could be a natural barrier such as lava outcrops or a river, or a man-made barrier such as a road or canal. The trespass would be settled prior to transfer. Only the portion of a parcel necessary to resolve the trespass is included in T1.

T2-Transfer-Agricultural Entry. 3,029 acres. These areas would be available for transfer from Federal ownership under the agricultural land laws or *for local and State Government needs or exchange*. Other types of transfers may occur only if agricultural entry transfers leave parcels in Federal ownership that are difficult to manage because of odd configuration, access problems, or lack of adequate facilities (fences, cattleguards, water, etc.). These resulting difficult-to-manage tracts could be transferred from Federal ownership by sale, exchange, or other means as determined appropriate as discussed under T1. *T2 areas found to be unsuitable for transfer under the agricultural land laws and not falling into the T1 category as described in the preceeding sentence would remain in public ownership and be managed as described for M1 areas.*

Up to 25 percent of the T2 areas could be retained in public ownership and managed as L11 areas under the Isolated Tracts HMP. Criteria to be used in selecting these areas are contained in Appendix C. The areas would be selected on a case-by-case basis as T2 lands are considered for transfer.

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Studies to determine suitability under the agricultural land laws include economic feasibility, physical suitability for agriculture, water availability, threatened and endangered species clearance, and cultural resources clearance.

In Alternative D, only parcels of low multiple use value covered by an agricultural entry application are included in T2.

Other Resource Uses in Alternative D.

Fire Management. Portions of the planning area, totalling 186,532 acres, would be under full fire suppression in Alternative D. Vineyard Creek ACEC (L6) and Box Canyon ACEC (L7) would be under full suppression to protect the naturalness and scenic quality of the areas. The Substation Tract ACEC and Silver Sage Playa ACEC would be under full suppression to protect natural vegetation communities. The Isolated Tracts (L11) and Pronghorn Winter Range HMP area (discussed below under Wildlife Habitat) would be under full suppression to protect the vegetation, primarily brush, important to wildlife habitat management objectives. *The Shale Butte WSA would be under full suppression to prevent recurring human-caused fires, ignited outside the WSA, from burning into or over the WSA and adversely affecting naturalness.* The areas discussed above would also be given priority for fire suppression in the fire management plan.

The remainder of the planning area would be covered by a limited suppression plan. The purpose of this plan would be to more efficiently use fire suppression funds. However, since the planning area is subject to large fires, limited suppression would only take place when the burning index is below 22. This would typically require full suppression during July and August. Large, repeated fires cannot be tolerated from the wildlife habitat and soil erosion standpoint.

The General Fire Suppression Guidelines in Appendix B under "Standard Operating Procedures" would apply to most of the planning area. Exceptions to these would occur in portions of the planning area totalling at least 356,477 acres. ^{1/} Surface disturbing equipment would be more likely to be used in Isolated Tracts (L11), Pronghorn Winter Range HMP areas (see Map 15), and brush protection areas to protect the vegetation, primarily brush, important to wildlife habitat management objectives. Surface disturbing equipment would also be more likely to be used in the Substation Tract ACEC and Silver Sage Playa ACEC to protect natural vegetation communities. On the other hand, use of surface disturbing equipment would be very limited in WSAs recommended suitable (L1) to protect wilderness character, in Cedar Fields SRMA (L10) to protect fragile soils and cultural resources, in the Oregon Trail area and Devil's Corral (L9a) to protect cultural resources, and in the Areas of Geologic Interest (L12) to protect fragile geologic formations. Guidelines for fire suppression in the above areas would be included in the fire management plan.

^{1/} The acreage involved in the brush protection areas and the Oregon Trail area is unknown at this time and would be determined in detailed examinations.

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Prescribed fire could be used as a tool for accomplishing the 13,000 acres of brush control proposed under Livestock Forage. The guidelines for Prescribed Fire in Appendix D under "Range Improvements" would apply. The use of prescribed fire in areas other than those proposed for brush control would be allowed only if found to be environmentally acceptable through consideration of environmental effects in the NEPA process. Such use could include projects such as noxious weed abatement or habitat management not foreseen at this time.

Prescribed fire would not be used in Substation Tract ACEC (L4), Silver Sage Playa ACEC (L5), Vineyard Creek ACEC (L6), or Box Canyon/Blueheart Springs ACEC (L7).

In Alternative D, 140 miles of roads would be maintained annually to improve access for fire suppression forces, and provide secure fuel breaks that could be used for firelines. This would cost approximately \$14,000 annually. The roads to be maintained are presently very rough and/or infrequently used. Vegetation growing in the roadways limits their usefulness as fire lines. The objective of this road maintenance is to help suppression crews keep fires smaller. This would benefit the wildlife habitat and soil erosion situation greatly.

For Alternative D, roads would be maintained throughout the planning area. This includes areas with relatively low fire occurrence. This higher level of presuppression would be done to help ensure that wildlife habitat, natural systems, and wilderness qualities were not adversely affected by wildfire.

Although other management practices to reduce wildfire size and occurrence are not proposed for Alternative D, they could be considered in the future as availability and effectiveness are demonstrated. Such practices might include seeding of fire resistant plant species in strips. The environmental effects of any such practices would be considered in the NEPA process before the practices could be implemented.

Wildlife Habitat. Several wildlife habitat objectives have been covered under the discussion of multiple use areas for Alternative D. Habitat objectives for the hybrid trout are covered under L6-Vineyard Creek ACEC; for the Shoshone sculpin, they are covered under L7-Box Canyon/Blueheart Springs ACEC; for the Bliss Rapids snail, they are covered under both L6 and L7; for ring-necked pheasant and gray partridge (upland game birds), they are covered under L11-Isolated Tracts. The discussion in Fire Management above specifies actions that would benefit wildlife. Following is a discussion of other wildlife habitat objectives for Alternative D.

Brush areas valuable to wildlife would be given priority for fire suppression in the fire management plan. Specific areas of importance would be identified in detailed examinations and development of HMPs discussed below. Guidelines for fire suppression would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan. Protection of brush pockets would be important in maintaining or enhancing habitat for sage grouse, pronghorn, mule deer, and non-game wildlife. It should be noted that areas of brush valuable to wildlife would likely change over time as some brush stands are burned by wildfire while others recover.

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Artificial nest structures would be constructed for the ferruginous hawk, Swainson's hawk, and burrowing owl to increase populations. Specific numbers and locations of these structures would be determined in detailed examination of habitat suitable for each species. Ferruginous hawk nest structures would be placed in remote areas. Swainson's hawk nest structures would be placed on Isolated Tracts (L11). Burrowing owl nest boxes would be placed primarily on Isolated Tracts, but also throughout the breeding range.

A Sage Grouse HMP would be prepared to guide management in the sage grouse winter habitat area covering about 67,000 acres (see Map 7). Objectives of this HMP would be to maintain and enhance sage grouse habitat by maintaining adequate, suitable areas of brush and providing additional forbs for brood rearing. Suitable forbs would be included in range seedings in this area. Guidelines for fire suppression to protect brush would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan.

A Pronghorn Winter Range HMP would be prepared for approximately 171,000 acres shown on Map 15. Objectives of this HMP would be to improve winter habitat for pronghorn by protecting valuable brush stands and increasing the brush component of the areas. Detailed examination would be required to determine the specific areas most important to the wintering animals. The possibility of seeding brush or fire resistant plant species would be examined for feasibility. Guidelines for fire suppression to protect brush would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan.

A Pronghorn Summer Range HMP would be prepared for 60,000 acres in the Wildhorse Allotment (see Map 9). Objectives of this HMP would be to improve summer habitat for pronghorn by maintaining adequate areas of brush, providing additional forbs, and providing new water sources. Suitable forbs would be included in range seedings in this area. Guidelines for providing additional water sources would be developed. Guidelines for fire suppression to protect brush would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan.

Livestock Forage. Provide 59,111 AUMs of livestock forage. Approximately 905,246 acres of public land would be included in grazing allotments (see Maps 1 and 9). Average stocking rate would be 15.3 acres per AUM.

The objectives for Alternative D would be to maintain existing perennial forage plants, maintain soil stability, and stabilize areas currently in downward trend.

The following range improvements would be accomplished in support of achieving the objectives stated above.

- 13,000 acres of brush control
- 38 miles of fencing
- 50 miles of pipeline
- 83 water troughs
- 5 wells
- 22 cattleguards
- 4 miles of road construction

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Total Cost of Improvements = \$732,500

20-year Maintenance and Replacement Cost = \$342,000

The proposed preference level for Alternative D is the level that would be expected to be available in a low production year. It represents a 60 percent reduction from present active preference. Climatic fluctuations can affect forage production from annual vegetation greatly. The 1977 drought year had the greatest documented effect on annual vegetation production since the vegetation in the planning area has included the major annual vegetation component that it presently does. Actual use data for 1977 were used in arriving at a proposed preference level for Alternative D.

The initial stocking level for Alternative D would be 97,892 AUMs (average actual use). Adjustments down to the proposed preference, 59,111 AUMs, would be done as discussed under implementation in Appendix D.

The range improvements proposed for Alternative D would be necessary to implement expected conversions from sheep use to cattle use and new AMPs. No new land treatments are proposed. The 13,000 acres of brush control is an on-going project covered by an existing AMP.

No changes in season of livestock use are proposed in Alternative D. This is because no resource conflicts were identified that would be resolved by such changes. However, changes in season of livestock use could be made in the future after considering environmental effects in the NEPA process if supported by monitoring.

New AMPs or CRMPs would be developed for nine allotments. This would bring the total area covered to 97 percent of the allotted acres.

In Alternative D, it is assumed that 8,529 sheep AUMs would be converted to cattle AUMs. Actual conversion would be consistent with the Shoshone District Conversion Policy. The assumed conversion is based on the same assumptions as described for Alternative B.

Cultural Resources. In addition to the Cultural Resource Management Plans discussed for Devil's Corral (L9a) and the Cedar Fields SRMA (L10), two other plans would be prepared; one for the Oregon Trail and one for Wilson Butte Cave. These plans would specify the degree of protection and the interpretation measures appropriate for the areas. In the case of the Oregon Trail, fire suppression guidelines to limit surface disturbance would be developed and incorporated into the fire management plan.

Soils. Several actions have been discussed which would help meet the objective of keeping soil erosion within tolerable levels. ORV use would be restricted in portions of the Snake River Rim SRMA (L9) and in the Cedar Fields SRMA to protect fragile soils. Fires would be given full suppression when the burning index is above 22 to help protect soils. Road maintenance would be conducted in key areas to help keep fires smaller, thus helping to protect soils. *Fire suppression guidelines to limit surface disturbance would be developed for the Cedar Fields SRMA.*

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In addition to the actions listed above, areas with severe erosion problems would be stabilized. At the present time, 150 acres of active sand dunes in the Lake Walcott area have been identified for a seeding project to stabilize the dunes. Other areas would be treated as they are identified, provided treatment would be feasible.

Priority would be given to emergency treatment of severe erosion areas caused by wildfire.

Summary of Activity Plans Required for Implementation of Alternative D.

Six Wilderness Management Plans (excluding Great Rift)

- One for each WSA recommended suitable.

One ORV Designation Implementation Plan

- Detailing how the ORV designations for the planning area would be implemented including public awareness, signing, and enforcement.

Four ACEC Management Plans

- One for each ACEC.

Three Recreation Activity Management Plans (RAMPs)

- One for each special recreation management area (SRMA)

Four Habitat Management Plans (HMPs)

- One would be a revision of the Isolated Tracts HMP.
- The others would be prepared for pronghorn winter range, pronghorn summer range, and sage grouse winter habitat.

Four Cultural Resource Management Plans

- One each for Devil's Corral, Cedar Fields, Wilson Butte Cave, and the Oregon Trail.

One Cave Management Plan

- For the L12 areas (Areas of Geologic Interest)

Nine AMPs, CRMPs, or other appropriate plans

- One for each of the nine allotments specified in Appendix D.

One Limited Fire Suppression Plan

The fire management plan will include guidelines to

- limit surface disturbance in WSAs recommended suitable, Cedar Fields SRMA, the Oregon Trail, and Areas of Geologic Interest.
- protect vegetation valuable to wildlife on Isolated Tracts, Pronghorn Winter Range HMP area, and brush protection areas.
- protect the naturalness and scenic quality of Vineyard Creek ACEC and Box Canyon/Blueheart Springs ACEC .